

St Bartholomew's Burnley 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025  
Luke 14.1,7-14

Do you like dinner parties? I love them with close friends where we all bring food to share. I recall when my wife and I were first married and without children we set up, the same with our friends, these lavish dinner parties, using all the crockery, glasses and table decorations given to us as gifts at the wedding. No expense was spared. Sometimes it would take a day or two to set up the table and the room. We thought about the menu for days, the wine, and the timing of each course during the evening. Alas then along came children at a later date, and all this stopped. Our lives changed, meals with friends were much simpler with each of the guests at the meal bringing food, one entrée, the desert, while the host provided the mains. This continues to this day. Dinner parties are generally shared occasions in every way, even at family celebrations like Christmas and birthdays.

Jesus as we know from the Gospels was a regular dinner guest. He had been the guest of tax collectors

and friends. During his ministry from town to town he was invited to dine in many homes, some poor, some wealthy. He always had something to say on these occasions and often set the agenda by his words and actions. In today's Gospel he is the guest of an influential Pharisee, a leader of the Pharisees, part of the religious establishment, a power broker in Judaism of the time. The man and his friends have invited him to see how well they observe the niceties of the Law and how he will respond to this invitation and their behavior.

We are told in the first 6 verses of this Gospel for today that one of the guests at dinner to which Jesus was invited was a man with Dropsy, now an archaic term and associated with puffiness in the face, the swelling in the legs of an accumulation of fluid. Some suggest that he was a plant to test Jesus, while other wonder why he would have been allowed at all given the Pharisees obsession with ritual cleanness. He is certainly ill and confronts Jesus with his illness. He may have possibly been seated directly opposite Jesus.

At this point you can feel the tension rise. The Pharisees are watching Jesus. Will he wash his hands according to ritual? Will he heal? I imagine Jesus was aware of the tension and the eyes upon him. He asks permission of a sort, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" They do not answer. Why do they not answer? We do not really know or are told. None of them speak. So, no one can accuse Jesus of wrongdoing if the man is healed. Jesus asking the question first has seen to this. Then Luke records that Jesus healed him. The man is set free. The clear implication is that despite the law deeds of mercy are in order on the Sabbath.

While this dinner scene is one of marvelous healing there is something else going on at the same time. Luke's Jesus notices and observes that the dinner guests appear to only be concerned about themselves including the disciples and those of lesser status. We read,

“When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them another parable: When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat’. Then humiliated, you will have to take the least important seat.”

Obviously, there was some sort of pecking order among those present at the dinner. Wherever one sat reflected one’s status. Jesus on the other hand suggests that one should take a less exalted and humbler seat. How would you feel if your host asked you to move? It has happened to me. A Bishop has often replaced me.

The point being made by Luke’s Jesus in this passage is that this dinner to which Jesus had been invited along with his disciples was not about helping others but rather helping oneself. The meal was not so much about hearing from Jesus whose reputation had preceded him but rather about themselves. The meal

was not about enjoying Jesus 'company and learning from him, and so the next parable we read is as jarring as the challenge to the status of those present. Jesus then says to his host,

“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours.....but when you give a banquet, invite the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Let the occasion be one of not what can it do for me but what can it do for the other.”

There are many times in the church and even in our own lives that we may do the right things for the wrong reasons. Our motives are not always noble and our response to the issues of the day clouded by self-interest.

As I read today's Gospel, I felt personally ashamed that I cannot do more. We live increasingly in troubled and challenging times and I do not know about you but I must admit to a growing sense of impotence in the face of ugly forces at work, not only in the wide world but even in the world of our daily habitation-greed,

prejudice, anger, conflict lack of compassion and generosity all seem to have the upper hand.

In this context where do we as Christians find hope? Where do we find leadership? Where do we find inspiration? It's time perhaps for the defiant words of Jesus to the religious and political leaders of the day we have heard from Luke's Jesus over the past few weeks including today to be taken to heart, to be spoken and heard. Words of encouragement, solidarity and hope not for our own sake but for the wounded, humiliated and excluded people of our time and for the future of the whole of creation.

Rowan Williams in his short book on discipleship speaks about how we can be light and salt in our world by offering hope to others by changing the landscape that encages us and that shuts out others. We can do this by the decisions we make, the attitudes we express and by living healthy and reciprocal relationships. The commitment of this parish to the issue of Climate change is an excellent example. Jesus by his presence and actions in today's Gospel does precisely this. He

seeks to change the landscape, to build the new creation, and to see the face of God in the other.

Challenging for me and for you.

Amen